

## **MINUTES**

### **Joint Meeting Regional Council of Rural Counties and California Biodiversity Council October 10, 2001 Fish Camp, California**

#### **Members Present**

Mike Pool, Bureau of Land Management (Co-Chair)  
Doug Balmain, San Joaquin Valley Regional Association of California Counties  
Louis Blumberg, Department of Forestry and Fire Protection  
Alex Glazer, University of California  
Diane Holcomb, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Nancy Huffman, Northern California Association of County Supervisors  
Diana Jacobs, Department of Fish and Game  
Beth Jines, California Environmental Protection Agency  
Deborah Maxwell, USGS Western Ecological Research Center  
Robert Meacher, Regional Council of Rural Counties  
Frank Michny, Bureau of Reclamation  
Gerry Miller, Department of Food and Agriculture  
Nancy Pfeffer, Southern California Association of Governments  
Brad Powell, USDA Forest Service  
H. Wes Pratt, California Conservation Corps  
Jim Shevock, National Park Service  
Mike Shulters, US Geological Survey  
Paul Stein, Sacramento-Motherlode Regional Association of California Counties  
Dick Troy, Department of Parks and Recreation  
Col. Joe Wendel, US Marine Corps  
Darryl Young, Department of Conservation

#### **Opening Remarks and Introductions**

Mike Pool, State Director, Bureau of Land Management (CBC Co-Chair)  
Robert Meacher, Chairman, Regional Council of Rural Counties

Director Pool and Chairman Meacher open the meeting by introducing themselves and acknowledging that this is the fourth joint meeting between the CBC and RCRC. Mike Pool noted that meeting with RCRC is important to the CBC because of its long-standing theme of strengthening ties with local government.

The meeting co-chairs asked that folks take a few minutes to introduce themselves to the other attendees seated at the same table.

#### **Welcome**

Doug Balmain, District 2 Supervisor, Mariposa County and CBC member

After being introduced by Mr. Meacher, Doug welcomed the group to Mariposa County. He noted that the county is rural and sparsely populated. In the 1,445 square miles of land mass

there are only 17,200 people. Additionally, in the entire county there is not one stoplight. Fifty-two percent of Mariposa County is owned either by the Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, or the USDA Forest Service. The County is blessed with an abundance of rangelands, oak woodlands, timberlands, and alpine woodlands.

### **Follow-up from Rohnert Park Meeting** – Improving Participation by Local Government in Public Land-Use Planning

This is a follow-up discussion from the 2000 joint meeting of the CBC and RCRC in Rohnert Park where a panel of county supervisors addressed this topic. The panel described the importance for many rural communities to be intimately involved in public land use planning as public lands predominate their area. Additionally, the panel also described the difficulties that many counties have engaging in public land-use planning. At the conclusion of the panel, Mary Nichols and Tom Bamert asked CBC and RCRC staffs to develop some recommendations for improving this condition and to present their findings at this meeting.

Bob Meacher introduced this follow-up discussion by stressing the importance of getting rural voices heard in the higher levels of resource management. Most rural counties lack the capacity to engage on a variety of issues with a variety of state and federal agencies. To further this dialogue, Mr. Meacher introduced the incoming Chair for RCRC, Linda Arcularius of Inyo County.

Ms. Arcularius indicated that counties could make meaningful comments and have them incorporated into planning efforts. To facilitate this involvement, Ms. Arcularius made the following suggestions:

- Shifts in perceptions will occur through successful collaborative efforts
- Cooperative relations between local government and agriculture could be strengthened by regular informal meetings
- Significant benefits could be reaped from increases in technical staff through a non profit loan
  - State agencies would be able to learn about rural issues
- It would be beneficial to inventory county resources and share technical expertise and staff between counties
- Establish a designated county liaison to work with the state and federal agencies
- Utilize a third party non profit to orchestrate funding
- Federal planners could lead large planning efforts
- Promote local expertise to coordinate in strategic regional planning
- Apply for Cooperative Agency status
- Develop county expertise in one or more areas of strategic planning
- Develop blue print for collaborative forums
- Develop financial support for collaborative forums

Mike Chapel (Regional Forester's Representative, USDA Forest Service) responded to Ms. Arcularius' comments from the federal perspective. He indicated that the federal government would like to act more cooperatively with counties. He believes that stronger coordination can better integrate projects and the counties can add much need expertise and knowledge. He explained that there are three items that the federal government knows that counties need:

1. To better understand these large regional processes and engage in them
2. Access to sound science and technology

### 3. Occasional staff assistance

Mr. Chapel felt it was important to follow the model of the CBC/RCRC joint meetings – to actively seek out others, dialogue, and build these important relationships. He also stressed that the local government partners know what other counties are doing.

In closing, Ms. Arcularius asked attendees to please send comments her way so she can figure out the specific voids in local government planning capacity.

### **Program: Fire Protection and Fuels Management Initiatives in California**

To begin the program on fire protection and fuels management in California, the USDA Forest Service (USFS) and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF) provided an overview of the 2001 Fire Season.

Louis Blumberg, Deputy Director for Public Affairs, Public Education and Legislation for CDF, started by explaining that the 2001 fire season is not over yet, but that he would provide as current of an update as possible. As of October 1, 2001, CDF had responded to 5,880 fires that burned 69,479 acres. This year, the number of fires is essentially equal to the average for the last five years (1% above the five-year average). However, by acres burned, this season is 29% fewer acres than the five-year average. In the Northern Region, CDF has responded to 15% more fires than the five-year average, while the acreage burned is only 6% greater than the five-year average. In the Southern Regional, CDF has responded to 11% fewer fires and the acreage burned is 43% less than the five-year average.

There are two main contributing factors to these statistics 1) State resources have been augmented in the Northern Regional – a 4<sup>th</sup> fire fighter was added on all 180 Northern engines; and 2) USFS resources were augmented through the implementation of the National Fire Plan, which has lessened the drawn down on CDF resources.

Several trends noted by CDF this fire season are:

- Suppression costs continue to rise – fires are more and more complex due to interface issues
- Changing Face of CDF – the level of experienced fire fighters is in decline
- Both people and the press are turning to the web for up-to-date information on fires
- Funding has become critical, facing new cuts, and operating at levels similar to those in the 1980s.

In conclusion, Mr. Blumberg noted that fire suppression in California remains strong.

To review the 2001 fire season from a federal perspective, Brad Powell (Regional Forester for the USDA Forest Service) made a concise presentation. Mr. Powell explained that the twelve-month period ending in September was the driest such period in over 100 years of record for many locations in the northwest. Reno measured the driest water year (October – September) since records began in 1872. Modoc County had its driest rain year (July – June) in 48 years. Lassen County finished June at 40% of normal precipitation. Since the second half of October is typically quite damaging due to fires, Brad went on to explain the weather features of notes for the next two weeks that may affect areas experiencing dryness. These features include:

- Above-normal precipitation from Utah northward to southern Montana
- Normal to below-normal rainfall from California to Washington
- Across the West, temperatures averaging above normal during October 3-7, but below normal on October 8-13.

## **Overview of Current Fuels Conditions in California Forests and Rangelands and the Role of Fire in Wildland Ecosystems**

Jan Van Wagtendonk, Western Ecological Research Center, US Geological Survey, Yosemite Field Station

Simple in overall conception, the use of fire in ecological restoration is a highly complex undertaking. Mr. Van Wagtendonk indicated that to be successful, fire management programs require a clear set of goals based on a detailed understanding of the role fire has played in the local forest environment. Managers also need extensive information regarding fuel loads, weather, topography and other factors to make informed decisions on where, when, how often and how hot to burn.

His current work has centered on the development of a new, high-resolution fuels map for Yosemite National Park. The map is based on satellite images of vegetative cover broken down into 30 by 30 meter squares, each representing one of 30 unique fuel categories. Additional data are provided by geographic information system (GIS) maps, aerial photographs and field measurements from more than 1,000 sites. This information is coupled with a computer model for predicting exactly where and how fast a given fire may spread.

The final product is a versatile tool for understanding fire behavior. Because of its relatively fine scale, the map captures the mosaic-like nature of surface fuels over fairly small areas. Studies have demonstrated that fire spread is highly sensitive to this kind of local variability in fuel type, but previous fuel maps derived from remote sensing data have been unable to capture this level of detail. Moreover, the depth of information contained in the map allows researchers to conduct both long-term and real-time predictive modeling.

The map and model have already been used on several occasions to predict the behavior of natural fires. From each such application, further refinements are made. In these initial tests, such as during Yosemite's Horizon Fire in 1994, the model performed well, said van Wagtendonk, providing managers with maps showing where fire perimeters would be at various future times, based on existing or changing weather conditions. The model has since been used to plan and execute prescribed burns in the park and to predict fire behavior on landscapes subjected to different techniques of understory fuel reduction, from mechanical thinning of trees to prescribed burning.

Van Wagtendonk also noted that potential applications go beyond managing fires within the park. The mapping and data analysis techniques he has developed can in principle be extended to much larger areas, such as the entire Sierra Nevada. The fuels modeling package can also be used as a research tool. For example, scientists can approximate what the local landscape might look like without a history of fire suppression, by allowing past suppressed fires to "burn" and run their course on computers.

Additionally, we have many challenges when it comes to fires and allowing them to interact in wildland ecosystems. They include:

- Allowing fire to play its natural role as nearly as possible
- Allowing people to live in a fire-safe environment
- Allowing for the extraction of renewable timber resources
- Living in harmony with our environment

### **Panel and Open Discussion: The Roles for Biomass Utilization in Fuels Management and Other Programs**

Moderator: The Honorable Dick Dickerson, California State Assembly

Before introducing the four panel members, Assemblyman Dickerson reiterated the importance of biomass in both forest health and power generation in California. Mr. Dickerson has long been a strong proponent of biomass and has authored related measures for the California Legislature (AB 802 and 1130).

#### **Biomass harvest as a fuels management strategy**

Gary Nakamura, Coop Extension Forestry Specialist, UC Coop Extension, Redding

The health of California's interior forests is threatened by the presence of too many trees, a situation created in part by successful fire-suppression activities in fire-adapted ecosystems. Understory trees and shrubs have survived where once they were destroyed by frequent, low-intensity fires, resulting in dense stands of trees and shrubs, which become fuel ladders into the crowns of larger trees.

Fires on or near the ground are controllable and survivable, while fires in the tree crowns are intense and forest destroying. The presence of so much hazardous fuel; more activity in the forest increasing risk of fire starts; and hot, dry, windy conditions can turn what were previously controllable fires into uncontrollable, stand-replacing wildfires.

Fire hazard can be reduced by thinning the small trees from the forest, reducing wildfire intensity from one that requires bulldozers to one controllable with hand tools. Until recently, small trees were not processed into any commercially valuable product. Harvesting small trees became economically feasible when, encouraged by California law in the mid-1980s, a market developed for wood fuel for electric power plants.

Forest biomass refers to the total aboveground plant material mass of a forest. Operationally, biomass harvesting has been equivalent to whole-tree harvesting and use of material that has typically been left in the forest to decompose. The ability to gather trees into bunches and handle them with feller-bunching machines makes it economically feasible to remove the biomass from the forest for processing into fuel chips or other products.

Densely stocked stands are suitable candidates for biomass harvesting because reducing inter-tree competition will improve the vigor of the residual trees and improve their resistance to insects and drought; there is sufficient biomass per acre to make harvesting and hauling economically feasible; and such levels of biomass accumulation constitute a severe fire hazard.

Trees harvested for biomass range in size from 2 in. diameter at breast height (DBH) and 15 ft. tall to 8 in. DBH and 40 ft. tall. Harvesting larger trees for higher-value products is often combined with break-even or uneconomical biomass harvesting, essentially an investment in improving the health of the stand. With current equipment, efficient and safe biomass harvesting occurs on slopes less than 30%. Equipment exists for steep slope harvest, but operating costs are higher and damage to reserve trees is more difficult to control.

Feller-bunching machines must travel to each tree to be harvested. Soil compaction is a concern, but driving equipment over slash or forest floor litter and duff rather than bare soil would reduce the extent of compaction. Limiting traffic to designated skid trails and limiting traffic on wet soils could reduce the area of significant compaction.

Removing limbs, branches, and leaves from the forest raises concerns about depleting soil nutrients. Temperate forest ecosystems have 80% of their total mineral nutrients (nitrogen, phosphorus, calcium) in the soil, 9% in the forest litter, and 10% in the standing biomass. Thus, whole tree harvesting would remove less than 10% of the total nutrients in a forest because only a portion of the stand is being removed. Nitrogen, usually the nutrient limiting growth, is replenished with the rainfall and mineralization of soil organic matter; other mineral nutrients are derived from the soil. As presently practiced, biomass harvests to reduce fire hazard might occur every 15-20 years, so nutrient depletion should not be a problem except possibly on the poorest sites where soils are thin and infertile. Like any powerful and effective tool, whole-tree removal must be wielded with consideration of all the costs and benefits.

Fire is coming to be appreciated as a necessary part of healthy forest ecosystems in California. The occurrence of large, catastrophic wildfires in recent years attests to our inability to control them. Fire cannot safely be reintroduced into the forest ecosystem with the current levels and structure of fuel. Forest biomass harvesting offers one method for reducing fire hazard on certain slopes and in certain stand conditions.

Mr. Nakamura went on to explain the economics of biomass harvest. Twenty-five green tons per acre of biomass equals 12.5 bone dry tons (BDT). You can haul one acre of biomass per truck and thus, one truck can haul 12.5 BDT to the processing plant. The haul to the processing plant is often on 5-20% slopes and averages a distance of fifty miles. The total delivered cost of biomass to the processing plant is approximately \$30-50 per BDT.

### **Ecological roles of biomass material**

Bill Laudenslayer, Research Wildlife Ecologist, Pacific Southwest Research Station, USDA Forest Service

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Dr. Bill Laudenslayer followed and explained that dead wood plays significant ecological roles in forests by providing habitats for wildlife, nutrient reserves for soils, erosion control, and other functions. However, current scientific information does not provide precise relationships between fuels conditions and protection of other resource values.

## **Economic Uses for Biomass**

Loyd Forrest, TSS Consultants

Mr. Forrest first noted that with biomass financing is the key issue. Economically, a 10-year market for ethanol is critical for financing. Initially, the first couple of biomass harvesting plants will most likely cost 30 percent more in terms of capital investment, next two about 15 percent more.

He stressed that we need to ask question "are there enough public benefits to justify subsidies?" Additionally, he felt that it is the state's job (California Energy Commission, Governor Davis, and legislature) to say yes. A direct subsidy on feedstock doesn't make sense.

## **Challenges for putting it all together**

Dean Cromwell, Senior Research Manager, Fire and Resource Assessment Program, CDF

For many resource-based industries, adoption of ethanol presents a way to transform costs of managing organic wastes, called biomass, into a source of income. Many industries -- including forestry and farming -- historically have relied on burning waste, such as piles of branches or young trees cut during a logging operation, and rice straw or almond hulls. But this type of waste management pollutes.

In the face of tightening restrictions on burning, efforts now focus on converting biomass into fuel. Transport costs, in many cases, represent the biggest obstacle.

We hope to find anything that allows movement of wood waste into something other than burning on site. We have tried to encourage any projects that are economically viable.

Removing wood waste from forests can boost fire prevention and protection efforts. Young trees often are cut from a timber stand to make room for stronger and perhaps more commercially desirable tree species. In thinning operations like these, not all of the trees cut have commercial value, either because they are too small or perhaps some have disease or insects or already have died. In some cases, the branches of marketable trees are sawed off to ease transport and sawmill operations. In standard timber harvests, loggers occasionally cut into a tree only to find it has rotted inside and can't be milled. All these leftovers of a timber harvest are heaped into a "slash pile." Traditionally, these are burned.

Without burning, however, slash piles are like a fuse waiting to be lit. With urban development encroaching, not only are burning operations more offensive as a source of pollution, but also fire danger multiplies.

Mr. Cromwell also noted that none of the interests regarding biomass are strong enough to develop or control biomass policy without talking to each other. Today, in policymaking, we don't always look at the objectives and, most often, decision-making occurs under a great deal of uncertainty. To ease these problems it is necessary to:

- Maximize our options
- Spread risk over many supporting organizations
- Foster and support as much creativity as possible

- Support research and information development

Additionally, the biomass industry is facing a suite of institutional barriers, including:

- Valued habitat
- Unclear tradeoffs
- Dependence of many products on advanced technology with long-term state and federal projects
- Private investors are suspicious of the conflicting levels of government

We face many challenges in the task include the search for acceptable rhetoric and an acceptable framework for action. The government needs to do both of these. To that end, we must start with trying to continue efforts to cooperate between government and private interests, allocating money for this coordination, developing programs for broad-based projects and giving the industry financial support to pull this off.

## **Community Fire Protection Under the California and National Fire Plan Initiatives**

This panel of USDA Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and Department of Forestry and Fire Protection representatives serves to explain state and national initiatives for community fire protection.

### **The National Fire Plan**

Brad Powell, Regional Forester, Pacific Southwest Region, USFS

In August 2000, the Departments of Agriculture and Interior developed an interagency plan to respond to the wildfires of 2000, the worst fire season in 50 years. Additionally, the plan was to reduce the risks to communities in the urban-wildland interface and assure sufficient firefighting capabilities in the future. Congress mandated the implementation of the National Fire Plan through its appropriations actions and program direction.

The National Fire Plan is intended to serve as an umbrella documents for the other major tactical reports designed to improve the effectiveness of wildland fire management and prevention. For example:

- The "Cohesive Strategy" (addressing fuels reduction)
- Policy Implications of Large Fire Management (addressing costs)
- An Agency Strategy for Fire Management (addressing workforce)

The plan is a long-term commitment and the fundamental premise is investing now in an optimal firefighting force, fuels reduction, and community protection will save lives, property, resources, and money now, and in the future.

The National Fire Plan is guided by nine operating principles:

1. Firefighting readiness and safety
2. Prevention through education
3. Rehabilitation
4. Hazardous fuels reduction
5. Restoration
6. Collaborative stewardship



7. Monitoring
8. Creating job
9. Applied research and technology transfer

Some estimated outcomes for the Forest Service portion of the plan include: 1,800,000 acres of fuels reduction on federal lands; 395,000 acres of fuels reduction on nonfederal lands; 500 rehabilitation and restoration projects linked to key watersheds; 4,000 volunteer fire departments assisted; and 8,000 new jobs created.

The National Fire Plan has five key points – Firefighting; Rehabilitation and Restoration; Hazardous Fuel Management; Community Assistance; and Accountability.

### **The California Fire Alliance**

Mike Pool, State Director, Bureau of Land Management

The Alliance for a Fire Safe California was formed in June 1997 at the first annual California Under Fire Partnership Summit. Leaders of federal, state and local fire and forestry agencies pledged to cooperatively overcome barriers and pave the way for the creation of fire safe communities throughout California.

The Alliance consists of leaders from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, USDA Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, California State Fire Marshal's Office and the Los Angeles County Fire Department. The Alliance's goal is to empower local communities to establish their own solutions for fire safety by addressing issues of air quality, endangered species and watershed health.

Utilizing the combined expertise, resources and distribution channels of its members, the Fire Safe Council fulfills its mission to preserve California's natural and manmade resources by mobilizing all Californians to make their homes, neighborhoods and communities fire safe.

Since its formation in April 1993, the Council has united its diverse membership to speak with one voice about fire safety. The Council has distributed fire prevention education materials to industry leaders and their constituents, evaluated legislation pertaining to fire safety and empowered grassroots organizations to spearhead fire safety programs.

### **The California Fire Plan**

Louis Blumberg, Deputy Director for Public Affairs, Public Education and Legislation, CDF

Louis first explained the institutional infrastructure when it comes to fire in California. You have the California Fire Plan, Fire Safe Councils, California Fire Alliance, National Fire Plan and the Four-Party Agreement (suppression). Specifically, the California Fire Plan has four main components: prevention, responsibility, strategic planning, and reducing loss. The CA Fire Plan is required by statute, was revised in 1995 and the implementation began in 1998. From 1998 through 2002 (projected), the Fire Plan Implementation has been as follows:

- More than 250 projects
- State Funds: \$14.7 million

- Federal Funds: \$9 million
- Local Funds: \$1 million
- Private Funds: \$1.5 million

In 2001, the Forest Service and BLM completed a variety of Fire Plan fuel projects. The Forest Service using \$1.4 million funded 29 projects including 22 communities currently on the Communities at Risk list through existing cooperative programs. BLM completed 12 projects with \$800,000, ten of which are on the Communities at Risk list. Both of these agencies are funded through the National Fire Plan. Other National Fire Plan activities in California include:

- Western Governor's Association Dialogue
- Ten-year Strategy Implementation Plan
- National Association of State Foresters
- California Fire Alliance
- State and Volunteer fire assistance
- Fuel reduction projects
- Community-based fire prevention grants
- Communities at Risk list and Joint GIS projects

Specifically, the community based fire prevention grants funded 101 local projects. These grants were a product of a partnership between CDF, the Fire Safe Council, and BLM (who in 2001 funded \$4 million). This multi-year effort helped, among other groups, 85 local Fire Safe Councils accomplish education, fuel reduction and capacity building.

Louis went on to explain the Communities at Risk list he had mentioned before. This list ranks communities according to fuel hazard, assessing the probability of wildland fire. It defines the areas of suitable housing density that lead to Wildland-Urban interface fire protection strategy situation – “in the vicinity of...” federal and non-federal lands. There are 1169 communities statewide, 814 of them with a federal nexus. BLM, USFS and CDF will jointly follow up this ranking with GIS. There are a variety of prefire management projects including fuel breaks, community wildfire protection zones, prescribed fires, fire safe landscaping, forest stewardship, and defensible space for homes and fire fighters.

Projects slated for 2002 include a request from CDF for over \$4 million (from the National Fire Plan) for 60 fuel reduction projects identified by local communities as priorities through the California Fire Plan process. Additionally, California is just beginning to create a regional fire plan. It will be coordinated, interagency fire planning with CDF and the fire safe councils on a regional basis. It will incorporate CA Fire Plan data and methodology supported by National Fire Plan funding.

In conclusion, Louis noted that the California Fire Plan is delivering results on the ground. It is integrating science with public involvement effectively. It is a foundation for interagency success in the National Fire Plan implementation. The existing institutional structures are maximizing the efficacy of the National Fire Plan in California. And finally, the state is committed to sustaining the National Fire Plan.

## **GIS Support for Fire Protection Planning in California**

Wayne Mitchell, Assistant Northern Region Chief for Administration, CDF

Wayne began by briefly reviewing the main points of the California Fire Plan Framework for minimizing cost and losses from wildland fires: suppression systems, fuels, weather, assets, stakeholder involvement, and action plans.

The Fire Plan "targets the solution" by focusing on opportunities for "prefire management" activities to minimize damages to public and private assets. These include preventing ignitions, reducing fuels, establishing wildfire protection zones to improve firefighter safety and enhance the effectiveness of fire suppression, and restoring forests and brushlands to conditions where fire can assume its ecological role. In order to identify High Value/High Risk sites the Fire Plan maps vegetation and fuels, severe fire weather frequency, and sixteen different wildland assets at risk. It also evaluates the current level of suppression, or "level of service," provided by CDF and cooperators. CDF is increasing the use of tools, such as the California Fire Economic Simulator (CFES) and FARSITE (a spatial fire spread model) to predict how fire suppression resources and prefire actions may interact on the ground in order to reduce wildfire size, damages, and suppression costs.

Mr. Mitchell discussed an example comparing the Meadow Vista project fire inspections. By modeling a fire through the area, the two simulations show the extent of damage, hour by hour, to the area with inspection compliance and without inspection. He showed another example with the Applegate fire, using GIS to show how far the fire spreads in time with prefire treatment projects and without. In Applegate, the size of the fire grows from 460 acres to 1536 acres without prefire treatment. Additionally, GIS can be used for damage assessment, cost share estimates, and land use planning assistance.

## **Panel and Open Discussion: Local Initiatives for Community Fire Protection – Successes and Challenges**

The purpose for this panel was to describe some local efforts to complete community fire protection in ways that are consistent with the state and national fire plans. The panelists described their work and discussed how well the state and national fire plans are meeting their needs.

### **Coop Fire Planning for Oakhurst**

Candace Gregory, Assistant Southern Region Chief for Administration, CDF

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Candace Gregory (CDF) began by describing a cooperative fire protection planning for the Oakhurst area. This project has been ongoing for several years and is resulted in coordinated fuel breaks and other fuels reduction work across public and private lands.

### **Nevada County Fire Safe Council**

Peter Van Zant, District 1 Supervisor, Nevada County Board of Supervisors

Peter first explained the general nature of the Fire Safe Council program in California. They are partners in prevention based on the understanding that the government can't do it alone. The statewide council was formed in 1993 and now there are over 90 local fire safe councils. The framework for the councils includes:

- Partnership – leverage
- Education – empowerment and credibility
- Outreach – capacity building

Next, Mr. Van Zant discussed the process of establishing and operating a local fire safe council. The Fire Safe Council of Nevada County (FSCNC) began organizing in 1998. A partnership of public & private interests formed and agency representatives took the lead. The first Chair was a CDF Battalion Chief and they established the basic council structure, wrote our mission statement, and prepared to present the FSCNC to the community. They additionally battled administrative details like securing Incorporation Tax Exempt status; insurance; hiring an Executive Coordinator; setting up an office; creating job descriptions; and establishing a budget. The start-up funding included cash from local insurance agents and volunteers and in-kind contributions of furniture, paper, stamps and copying supplies from agency donations.

Early issues included:

- Perception by volunteers that agency representatives dominated the organization
- Community thought they were a government agency
- Overcoming personal agendas
- Overlap of committee responsibilities, and
- Funding

However, the FSCNC is a success story. After completing the administrative details, they turned their energy to program creation. They have approximately 50 very active volunteers that make the programs possible. They maintain a membership list of 250 interested residents and organizations. Current programs include defensible space chipping/shredding, road and infrastructure mapping, *Fire Wise is Fire Safe* booklet, Fire Wise Plant program, Fire Wise Chats and demonstrations, senior assistance, *Wildfire Safety for Kids* coloring book, website (<http://firesafe.nccn.net>), burn permit issuance, air fest, and more.

Most notably, the FSCNC provides a free shredding program for leaves and pine needles. The residents submit a request form when the material has been raked into piles. The shredded leaves and needles are reduced to 1/7 of their original volume. The resulting mulch is excellent for gardens and flowerbeds, and also works well for erosion control.

This year, the FSCNC received the Bronze Smokey Award. This is the highest National honor given for community based fire prevention work.

Peter concluded with his lessons learned:

- Secure long-term funding for administrative expenses
- Develop a close relationship with all levels of government
- Involve homeowners, insurance, businesses
- Keep volunteers busy

- Make communication a priority
- Be realistic about your goals.

### **Southwest Interface Project**

Mark Thornton, District 4 Supervisor, Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors

Southern Tuolumne and northern Mariposa counties have a long history of major catastrophic wildfires. In this 132,000-acre area, five firefighters have lost their lives in the line of duty. During the last 15 years, an average of 4,000 acres have burned annually. Climate, terrain, and an abundance of volatile natural vegetation combine to form one of the most fire-prone environments in the world.

Increasing the danger to private property and natural resources is a classic wildland-urban interface with business and residential concentrations located within highly combustible wildland fuels. The area includes State Highway 120 - a heavily traveled main tourist route into Yosemite National Park, and high-value watersheds providing the City and County of San Francisco and California's central valley with water and power. The Stanislaus National Forest and other public lands within the area are popular recreation destinations.

Wildfire does not respect political boundaries. In March of 1999, City, County, State, and Federal agencies began working together to mitigate the wildland fire problems in this area. The Southwest Interface Project objective is to protect life, property, and resources using a number of sound fire and fuel treatment planning and implementation strategies.

The SouthWest InterFace Team (SWIFT) will be working closely with Fire Safe Councils, other agencies and associations, local businesses, homeowners and many others in meeting the project objective.

Of significant importance is the commitment, dedication, and teamwork applied by the initial eight agencies that, for the last two years, have maintained the desire to "make a positive difference" in the protection of people, their homes and businesses, the communities and all our natural resources. Determining the best way to make that difference has taken some time with many meetings and discussions, and most recently, actual joint agency field reviews.

Two specific actions that SWIFT, Fire Safe Councils, private citizens, and others will hopefully commit to include planning and implementation of Strategic Fire Defense Systems and Pre-Attack Planning. Descriptions, definitions, and the reasoning behind these two actions are fully identified in various SWIFT project documents available to all.